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U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-Highland Park, has been elected co-chairman of the U.S. House Republican Tuesday Group.

The group has 35 members who are generally considered Republican "moderates." Conservative critics have called members of the group "liberal." The group describes itself as "mainstream."

"We will focus our group on pro-defense, pro-personal responsibility and pro-science legislation," Kirk said Thursday in a statement.

A priority will be "slowing spending in Congress," he said.

An alliance with the Republican Conservative Study Group will make it "harder for the House to pass bills with higher spending levels," Kirk said.

Last summer, Kirk worked with moderate Democrats on legislation to curb spending. The legislation failed but Kirk said he plans on offering changes to the House rules in January that will require a three-fifths vote for any bill that increases entitlement spending.

"Mainstream Republicans agree that we should reform our rules, making it harder to increase spending," he said. "By reforming the rules of the House we can build strong alliances across party lines to slow spending. We will help to build a bipartisan consensus to balance our budget and save Social Security and Medicare."

Other Tuesday Group priorities include encouraging stem cell research, protecting the environment and supporting U.S. allies overseas, Kirk said.

"In the House and as a commander in the Naval Reserve, Mark is a demonstrated leader who promotes a positive message and agenda to unite our party," said Ohio Congresswoman Deborah Pryce."

New Hampshire Congressman Charlie Bass is co-chair of the Republican Tuesday Group.

Kirk is a member of the House Appropriations Committee.